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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000828

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FBI FOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR PISTOLE

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF DEPUTY FBI DIRECTOR JOHN  
PISTOLE

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Deputy Director Pistole, we look forward to your visit to Bangkok. Bilateral relations with Thailand have been generally excellent. Thailand is a security treaty ally and has been firmly supportive of the Global War on Terror. American businesses have over \$20 billion in direct investment in Thailand, the second largest investor after Japan. Thailand and the U.S. have long enjoyed a close security relationship. Thailand is a Major Non-Nato Ally (MNNA) of the United States. For years, Thailand has hosted the Cobra Gold annual exercise, our largest multilateral exercise in Asia. We have strong relations with Thai law enforcement officials and have had great success in fighting narcotics trafficking. We are presently working to improve coordination among Thai police units and between the Thai law enforcement community and the Thai military to fight terrorism. We are also working with the Thai military and customs officials to support regional maritime security and the Container Security Initiative. In 2004-5, thanks to years of working with the Thai military, the United States was able to quickly deploy over one thousand American soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen to Utapao Naval Air Base and set up a regional tsunami relief operation. Thai cooperation in the Global War on Terrorism is excellent. The capture of the JI terrorist Hambali in 2003 highlighted the willingness of Thailand to work against international terrorism.

PM THAKSIN

12. (SBU) In 2001, Thaksin became the first democratically elected civilian Prime Minister to win an outright majority in the Thai Parliament. Thaksin won reelection in a landslide victory in February 2005. His Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) political party dominates domestic politics and controls 375 of the 500 seats in Parliament. Thaksin comes from a prosperous Sino-Thai family in Thailand's second largest city, Chiang Mai, and placed first in his class at the National Police Academy. He spent several years studying in the United States, earning a master's degree in Criminal Justice from Eastern Kentucky University and a Doctorate in Criminology from Sam Houston State University. After a few years with the police, he left government service to run the family business (Shinawatra Corporation, or Shin Corp), which he turned into Thailand's largest telecom company, making himself a multi-billionaire.

13. (C) Thaksin considers himself a personal friend of the President, drawing on their common Texas connections, and had a very successful meeting with President Bush on September 19 in Washington. They also met at the November 2005 APEC Leaders Meeting in Busan, South Korea. The PM characterizes himself as a "CEO Prime Minister" and likes to be known for being decisive. He is also impulsive. His critics accuse him of authoritarian tendencies, of staffing the major institutions of the country with his family members or classmates, and of reinforcing the business interests of family and political allies through government policies. The English-language Bangkok press has been especially critical of Thaksin. Although Thaksin remains firmly in control, recent anti-Thaksin protests have drawn large, albeit peaceful, crowds.

THE SOUTH AND TERRORISM

14. (C) The most pressing security concern for the Thai remains the unrest in Thailand's deep south provinces bordering Malaysia. The violence continues to occur almost daily with over one thousand persons reported killed over the past two years either by militants or government actions. The ongoing violence has historic roots going back a century and is based on local grievances from poor treatment by the government and a desire to separate the region from the Thai state. There still is no direct evidence of operational links between Thai separatists and outside terrorists. Incidents such as Tak Bai (in which some 80 Muslim men died in security forces' custody following an October, 2004 demonstration), Thaksin's harsh rhetoric and often ham-fisted police tactics, as well as a serious lack of coordination and information sharing between security agencies have exacerbated the

situation and relations with neighboring Malaysia.

15. (C) The National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), appointed by Thaksin last year and led by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, one of the most respected leaders in Thailand, is expected to announce a set of policy recommendations in March. Critics of Thaksin maintain that he is likely to pay lip service to the NRC's recommendations while still tending to some of his more authoritarian tendencies in his approach to the south. Nonetheless, Thaksin has committed his government to implementing education and economic reforms to benefit southerners -- a move we encourage -- and we urge him to listen seriously to the suggestions of the NRC. The Thai government does not seek a U.S. presence in the south and is sensitive to rumors of U.S. involvement in the violence. Nonetheless, we have worked closely to find areas where we can help. We have stepped up our human rights training of Thai troops rotating into the south to improve their ability to control crowds and conduct other operations in a way that complies with international norms. We are also working with the Thai to improve their intelligence sharing and gathering capabilities.

#### AFTERMATH OF THE TSUNAMI

16. (U) The massive rescue and recovery operation undertaken by the U.S. military as a result of the December 26, 2004 tsunami was historic and will likely be studied as a model

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for years to come. Mercifully, U.S. casualties were much lighter (two dozen confirmed or presumed dead) than those suffered by other countries. Thousands of Thai, Europeans and other Asians were killed -- primarily in resorts north of Phuket -- a haven for vacationers during the holiday season. Total fatalities will likely never be known; the official number is about 5,400 but Thai officials privately say they expect the final death toll to top 8,000. Joining colleagues from the U.S. military, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and police units from around the world, teams of FBI crime scene and forensics experts provided significant victim identification assistance for a three month period after the event.

#### OUTSTANDING ISSUES

17. (C) For most of the Thaksin administration, we have been at odds over our respective approaches to Burma -- essentially agreeing to disagree. The RTG under Thaksin has claimed that though it agrees that the regime must show progress in bringing out national reconciliation, Bangkok must stay engaged with the ruling junta in order to sustain a dialogue on issues that directly affect Thailand such as illegal immigration from Burma and narcotics smuggling. We have maintained that Thailand has appeared to go beyond this to the point of being perceived by some as justifying some of the regime's excesses. Lately, at our urging, the Thai have begun to move closer to regional and international opinion, by publicly criticizing Rangoon on its continued detention of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and resistance to genuine national reconciliation.

18. (C) We have also criticized the RTG for some of its human rights practices. A bloody crackdown on alleged drug vendors during a "war on drugs campaign" in 2003 and actions by security forces in the south, notably the aforementioned incident at Tak Bai, have been publicly raised by the United States in our annual human rights reports and in public fora, as well as in our private conversations with Thai officials.

19. (C) In meetings with Thai officials, you may wish to thank them for their cooperation with us in the Global War On Terrorism, most notably their deployments of troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, their assistance in the capture of Hambali outside Bangkok in 2003, and their role in promoting regional cooperation in fighting international terrorism. You may also solicit their opinion for ways the Bureau can assist in professionalizing Thai law enforcement units.

BOYCE